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Apprentice Snake Charmer



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Chapter 1 by Luke Meyers

First days on the job are always rough.

Chapter 2 by Kitiōn



Now I know your thinking why the hell a snake charmer, and in my defense I would say why not? Why do some people like to do autopsies, and why do some people like to be shot up to space in a tin can?

Well my argument is that it's a question of calling, and as for my my epiphany, it came at an early age when my parents took me to a circus. For a small child it was a feast for the senses, but the thing that made me stare in wonderment & awe was the snake charmer.

The snake charmer walked in the center of the ring carrying only a cushion, a wicker basket & Pungi. The crowd fell silent as the little man with a turban sat cross legged on his cushion & took the lid from the wicker basket, and signaling the audience to be very still.

The snake charmer picked up his Pungi and began to play, and for a minute or so there was nothing. The notes of the musical instrument washed over me & had a hypnotic effect, and then to the delight of the audience the head of a Cobra started to appear from the opening of the basket, and gradually the body of the snake extended through space in a verrticle position, and then came face to face with the snake charmer, and together they both swayed from left to right in unison.

My heart pounded with sheer joy & excitement, and it was then that I decided what it was I wanted to do with my life. I was a snake charmer. I would never let asthma get in the way of playing a wind instrument, and besides I would have an alibi for extreme emergencies!

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Chapter 3 by Inteliker



I now stood outside the 7-Eleven with a beat-up suitcase in hand and a ukelele. The asthma problem had been solved to a degree with the compromise of the instrument, and within the suitcase was my snake. Well, I hoped he was still there. I'm terrified of snakes, to be honest, and hadn't even looked in the suitcase after buying him off a local boy earlier that week who said he had caught him in the nearby woods. I had dropped some bread and shrimp through the slit in the side as the boy had told me to do, but I wasn't quite ready to face the snake without the guidance of my master.

"Luke?"

I turned to see an Indian gentleman in the doorway of the 7-Eleven. It was Mr. Banik.

"Luke, that is you. How are you, my boy. I haven't seen you since you quit three summers ago."

We shook hands and I retold my story of having seen the snake charmer at an early age and how my dream had always fueled my imagination. I told him that I wanted him to train me.

"What? Because I am Indian, you think I can charm snakes? As if every Indian child is taught this in elementary school?" Mr. Banik frowned. "Well, you are correct. Let me see what you have brought me."

I showed him my ukelele and he nodded. I laid the suitcase down on the sidewalk and opened it to reveal an emaciated lizard. This was a surprise to me, and the emotion must have registered on my face. But Mr. Banik nodded again.

"I see you wish to be your own unique kind of snake charmer, Luke. This is good. All traditions must progress. Shall we begin?"

Chapter 4 by intellikat



For the next three months I met with Mr. Bank every Saturday morning at 7am-- me and my lizard, who I had named Manolo. In time, and with great perseverance, I learned to charm the

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intensity of Manolo, and how the personality of the snake was just as important as the showmanship of the charmer.

By the end of the third month, Mr. Banik decided that he could teach me no more. After our session that Saturday, Mr. Banik leaned back on the sidewalk and sighed.

"There is a time, Luke, when all mongeese must leave the burrow and seek their fortunes abroad."

I cocked my head. "I think the plural of mongoose is mongooses, Mr. Banik."

"No matter. In this case, the burrow is this piss-stained and bottle-strewn parking lot. I have taught you all the secrets an Indian man may concerning the ancient craft of snake charming. And you have in turn been an excellent student. And you--" he patted Manolo on the head. "Are an excellent performer." Mr. Banik turned to me. "Now, there is but one thing left to do. You must devise a costume for yourself, and a stage name."

"How should I decide, Mr. Banik?"

"You must find the shade of a bodhi tree and meditate until the answer comes to you."

"Umm. I'm not sure we have any bodhi trees here in the LeHigh Valley."

Chapter 5 by Cameron Neill



As it turned out, I was both right and wrong. There were no actual bodhi trees in the LeHigh Valley as I suspected. There had been an attempt to bring them to stabilise the local soil at the Mekwa River to prevent erosion. The flood the previous year had sent the banks back to a level that threatened homes and the local council decided that the flood resistant trees would be a great addition to prevent further damage. What they hadn't anticipated that the Bodhi tree grows in warm climates and the frost bitten mornings here would send the young saplings into a early grave. Which for a tree, is highly conveniently placed.

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Along with a great chicken panini and a mean cappuccino came a lovely shaded deck to look over the river and contemplate the direction of one's life. With Manolo feasting on the used coffee grounds beneath the table I sat and stared out at the river for what seemed like hours.

Until it hit me.

"Of course," I whispered to no-one in particular.

Chapter 6 by intellikat



My very first public performance could have been worse. But it certainly should have been better.

The posters announcing my coming-of-age debut performance at the Saucon Valley Community Center littered the entire valley. My friends, family, critics, enemies even were all in attendance in Rental Room C that night. Folding chairs packed the room to legal capacity, just pushing the bounds of the fire code enough to generate a certain sexual excitement in the crowd. Behind a draped crimson bedsheet, Manolo and I were awaiting our entrance to Van Halen's "Panama".

"Manolo," I said, tapping him on his tiny wigged head and proffering a coffee bean, "This is it, mein freund. There's no turning back now." I adjusted my necktie as Alex Van Halen's drums and his brother's epic guitar intro began. I put the wicker lid atop Manolo's snake basket, took a breath, and goose-stepped onstage in my Adolf Hitler costume, saluting a raging audience and placing the basket centre stage. Through the fog machine and coloured lights, I could see my mother watching me with some trepidation. No matter.

"Adolph and Eva!" announced the recording over the room's PA system and through the hard rock and angry catcalls and boos.

Chapter 7 by özlem



When the tumultuous music stopped, angry audience lapsed into silence. I started to play my

ukulele tenderly. "Okay, let's slide to the right a bit." I thought to myself, looking directly into Manolo's eyes. He didn't move. "Okay, let's slide to the left." I thought to myself. He just blinked. I never knew he could blink.

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Angry crowd started to fidget again. I desperately stood alone in the middle of huge monumental stage with a petrified lizard and a ukulele in my hands. I raised my head and there he was sitting nearby the main entrance. Mr. Banik was talking to another man with a lilac turban. I instantly recognized the other man. Yes, that was him, the snake charmer that I saw at the circus when I was a child!

Chapter 8 by Dana Busby



I smiled nervously and thought hard. How could I save this performance? If I didn't save it, it would be likely that number one: no one would ever come to see me perform again, and number two: my childhood hero would refuse to have anything to do with me.

I cleared my throat and grinned, more confidently than I felt. "Did you hear about the chameleon who couldn't change colors?" I asked in a ringing voice. The audience relaxed slightly, looking happier. "He had a reptile dysfunction," I said in my best pharmaceutical commercial voice. There was a smattering of laughter. I looked to the back of the room, to the circus snake charmer. He had a look of mild interest.

I lifted Manolo to my shoulder. "Eva," I said, "What is the definition of a nervous breakdown?" The crowd chuckled in anticipation. "A chameleon on a Persian rug!" The audience chuckled again. I walked down the center aisle explaining, "Eva just loves a good chameleon joke."

"Eva?" I began, "How would you like to hear an iguana joke?" I gently tugged the end of Manolo's tail so he would shake his head 'no' like I had taught him. "She doesn't care for jokes about her own kind, folks."

The crowd laughed this time, a real, full laugh.

"Another chameleon joke then?" This time I pushed up on his tail gently and he nodded his head 'yes.'

The crowd really cracked up, many laughing pretty hard.

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I returned to the staged and placed Manolo on the floor, determined to do my charming routine. Manolo's paralysis seemed to have subsided and he was waiting expectantly for me to play my ukulele. I chose to play the most popular song for the ukulele, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," and Manolo began to dance just like we practiced. When he reared up on his hind legs and the crowd gasped happily. I stole a glance at the snake charmer; his hands were pressed as if in prayer under his chin. My heart jumped.

I returned my focus to my song and my lizard.

the end

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